

Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from December 24, 2007

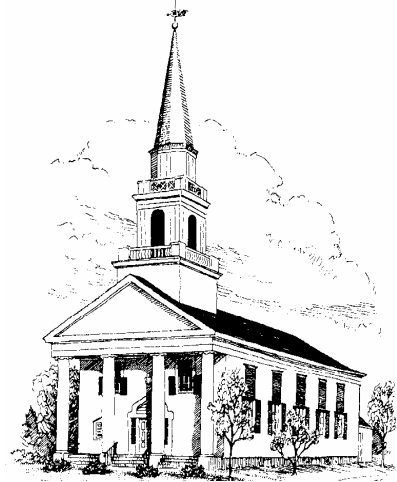
Rev. Barbara J. Libby

“A Christmas Meditation”

Scriptures:

Isaiah 9:2-7

Luke 2:1-20



“Year after year, the ancient tale of what happened on that first Christmas is told ... raw, preposterous, holy ... and year after year, our (that) world in some measure stoops to listen.” (*Frederick Buechner, A Room Called Remember, San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1984, p. 61.*)

Tonight, we hear again that ancient tale. Tonight, we have heard again the story of that first night of Jesus’ life on this good earth. If we are distracted, we could miss it. If we are still fretting over last-minute details, we could miss it. If we think we know the story and there’s nothing new for us to hear, we could miss it.

Someone has said, “Christmas is the nativity of consciousness.” Tonight is a night for each of us, even those who may have lost touch with story, to rediscover the wondrous, the miraculous, the unspeakable, the wild, the odd, the strange improbability of this child, wherever he was born, the son of God coming into this world. Tonight is a night for each of us to glimpse for just a moment, perhaps, the faith of those who, some 2,000 years ago, trusted and believed. Tonight is the night for each of us to look again at our own belief in this wondrous, strange, and miraculous mystery: the birth of Emmanuel, *God with us*, a living, breathing human child, the very child of God, who came to live among us.

Let us allow ourselves to be surprised by God this night. Let us open our hearts so that we might be amazed by a God so full of mystery and surprises.

Does the sight of a new baby make you smile? If it does, think for a moment about why it makes you smile. What is it about babies that invites us into a different place really, a place where we can, for a moment, be happy, be full of peace and even full of joy? Is it because each baby reminds us of other babies we have known? Or does each new child perhaps stir up wonder and awe in us?

The awareness of a new birth creates in me a precious moment of hope and promise. A new baby calls me back to fundamental things. An infant reminds me that we each came into this world in the same helpless form, a child of God. A new baby reminds me whose I am.

Tonight, we heard the prophet Isaiah's words, long before Jesus' birth, pointing to the birth of a future Messiah for this world. Those prophetic words of promise and hope were held onto for many generations as they waited for a savior to redeem the world. Luke's gospel tells us the simple story of the birth of a baby in Bethlehem, a baby born in meager surroundings to simple people yet born to be King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the Son of God! We heard about angels visiting shepherds out tending their fields that night. Along with the shepherds, we heard angel voices sharing amazing news. And we imagined shepherds going to Bethlehem to see what they could see.

Although we don't read about it tonight, we know as well of the wise sages who traveled from the east over great distances, following a bright star in the sky and eventually coming to pay homage to a child with rare gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And we know that this is all only part of a much larger story. We all know that the story didn't just stop there—with an infant in a manger with shepherds and some angels and a few visiting magi from distant lands.

We listen to stories with a certain intensity, don't we? Even if we've heard them many times before, we listen to stories because, somehow, we know that stories give us a clue about the meaning of our lives. Someone has said, "The power of stories is that they are telling us that life adds up somehow, that life itself is like a story." (*Frederick Buechner, from The Magnificent Defeat, p. 60*) If there is meaning in any life, then there is also meaning in our lives.

We know the Christmas story. We recall the details year after year, and we also know about what happened later on—once that baby grew up and became a force to reckoned with. Not right away, perhaps, but we know that within this story of birth, just as in our own story, there is also a story of death. And we remember that the death of Jesus had changed and transformed life and death for all of us. By faith we believe that the child born at Christmas was the Son of God, a Child of God, God with us in human form.

As a poet puts it:

There is a child in each of us waiting to be born again. It is to those looking for life that the figure of the Christ, a child beckons ...

Christmas is not for children. It is for those who refuse to give up and grown old, for those to whom life comes newly and with purpose each and every day, for those who can let yesterday go so that life can be full of new possibility always, for those who are agitated with newness whatever their age.

Life is for the living, for those in whom Christmas is a feast without finish, a celebration of the constancy of change, a call to being once more the journey to human joy and holy meaning. (Sister Joan/D. Chittister)

Every Christmas night, on these dark and long, wintry nights here in New England, we are reminded again that an amazing light came into a dark world on that first Christmas. We are reminded again that joy and peace and promise came into this world at Christmas once a long time ago. We are reminded that the light "shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

This night, we can either invite that light to burn within us or we can just shrug it off as so much imaginative “story” and we can simply move on to our Christmas festivities. This night, let us open our hearts. Let us remember that, with God, all things are possible. Let us remember that the old story has much to offer us, even here in Mystic, Connecticut, in 2007, as we approach Christmas Day. Let us know as we come forward this night for holy communion that we come to the manger scene at the front of the church; this night, as we come forward to receive the elements of bread and cup that remind us of a Savior who died for us that we also have the opportunity to receive a child into our hearts again, a child born in Bethlehem.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

